/83/ Joking Relationship

602 608 A very important institution is also linked to the family name. It concerns the ties called "joking relationship," dyo benatye (literally, agreement between us), which is integrated with the general kinship relationships designated in the Mandingo country by the term senãnkuya. But family relationships in the strict sense, called sindyi benatye (literally, breast milk between us), are to be distinguished from dyo benatye which, on the contrary, involves the members of two families, or even of two different peoples.

Thus, a Koulibali is a Kéita's senãnku among the Bambara; Bozo and Dogon as well as Bozo and Somono are also senãnku (1). To the

1. Joking relationship called senãnkuya among the Bambara is termed măgu among the Dogon, dagana among the Bozo, etc. This important institution, which embraces all the tribes of the French Sudan, has already been the object of a number of studies. See especially M. Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal Niger /The Upper Senegal and Niger/, Vol. 3, p. 206; H. Labouret, "La Parenté à plaisanteries en Afrique occidentale /Joking Relationship in West Africa/"; D. Paulme, Parenté à plaisanteries et alliance par le sang en Afrique occidentale /Joking Relationship and Blood Alliance in West Africa/; R. Radcliffe-Brown, On Joking Relationships.

In the "Alliance cathartique /The Cathartic Alliance/," M. Griaule throws light on the Dogon-Bozo relations which are at the origin of the institution in the Sudan. This brings out the fundamental notion of the duality of beings and the principles that animate them. A Dogon and a Bozo are twins, each carrying a particle of the other in his body and soul. When he insults or purifies, he appeals to that part of himself in the other and the powers he communicates in this way come to the help of his partner.

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The latest investigations on this subject have brought to light the following facts: Dogon and Bozo have, respectively, eight seeds and eight fish in their collarbones and thus they realize the distribution of the heavenly sustenance (see p. 53). This latter is evidence of their spiritual integrity and any breaking of taboos results first in depriving the person of his seeds or his fish. The purpose of the institution is to enable the ally to intervene in order to reinstate the nourishing substance in the body of the guilty person.

It should be stated here that in instances in which they are described by the same term (senãnkuya), kin relationships, which also involve joking exchanges, must not be confused with relationships between families (more exactly between names) or between tribes.

Moreover, within this last group, several types of alliances can be observed: some involve exogamy (Dogon and Bozo:- Bozo and Peul, etc...); others exclude the possibility of carrying out purification rites. It will therefore be necessary to examine as many cases as possible before establishing any rules for this type of alliance.

Mandé, a Koulibali and a Tangara, bound by a long and durable friendship, decided to seal it in a lasting way. They opened their veins and put a little blood from one wound into the other, thus realizing the alliance through this exchange. They next prepared a meal which they ate /84/ together while pronouncing their oaths never to spill each other's blood.

In this way the dyo benatye (1) was consecrated between them and

1. Because of this alliance, members of the Kouloubali family were authorized by the Tangara of the village of Barbé (region of Mopti) to settle in the village. The

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Tangara chief gave them land to build their houses and set up their fields. The two groups live in perfect understanding.

their descendants. Such an alliance is equivalent to kinship. It involves the absolute obligation never to covet the life or possessions of the senãnku. The two parties are obligated to mutual assistance in many cases: food, housing, material aid; help in case of war or lawsuit; obligatory presence at religious ceremonies; purifications in case a taboo is broken.

These rules imply that the alliance affects the individual not only in his social roles, but also in his spiritual principles. The senãnku is a kind of twin to each individual belonging to the other family. He has within himself a part of his partner and vice versa.

602 Because of this fact, the reactions set off by insult or by joking are singular: the senãnku will accept from the mouth of the other, without becoming angry, mockery which he would not normally tolerate. He cannot be affected by them since the words are addressed to that part of his being which comes from the person insulting him. Moreover, the joke or the insult, without touching his spiritual integrity, has the effect of confirming him in his position relative to the person addressing him and of affirming the state of both parties, thereby increasing their vitality. It determines movements of forces from which the two speakers reciprocally benefit, as from a kind word.

This proceeding is used on numerous occasions, particularly at the time a person achieves a new social status or a new grade. The senãnku jokes with a newborn child as soon as his name is given and, later, on the day he wears his first piece of clothing. The circumcised boys become allies and joke between themselves the day of the daworo which consecrates the age grade (1). On the evening of

1. See p. 241.

marriage, the young woman is the object of ritual sarcasm which marks her final introduction into the husband's family group.

602 783 The senãnku is the only one who, in certain cases, is able to carry out the purification rites made necessary by a broken taboo (tne). It is true that he carries in his collarbone—but only /85/ where his partner is concerned—twice the number of symbolic seeds,

596 assist his tne, while showing it the greatest respect. The mysti-
614 cal basis of this alliance sometimes causes the native to behave
621 in a particular way toward his tne: he will not look straight at
784 it; he will not touch it, unless absolutely forced to do so, and then he will apologize and ask forgiveness.

Anything may be the object of a tne, but there is probably not a single Bambara family which does not have some animal as tne. Expressions which the natives in general and the Bambara in particular use to make foreigners understand their relations with this animal tne have made many Europeans think that the native regards the animal as a relative in the literal sense of the word. This is not the case, as we have just seen, and consequently Bambara totem is a purely European invention (1). [225]

1. It should be understood that the tne has many sources besides one mentioned here, which is the only one pertinent to this chapter. Thus, Bala refused to pronounce any word having the syllable da (p.); Sounsan abstained from the kulé (p. , footnote 1).

596 II. The oath. In native society, a man who is ambitions
614 or merely anxious to establish a powerful community can do so
621 only with the support of faithful allies. Massa and Biton not only
608 succeeded in dominating their young companions, but they also bound them closely through the oath and the cult.

Undoubtedly all the founders of powerful communities have not proceeded in exactly the same way, but all of them have employed analogous methods. An isolated individual can accomplish nothing in this social milieu where everything rests on these strongly organized collectivities, the communities. Any Bambara eager for well-being and peace will seek out and attach himself to a "powerful protector" (dyigi seme) capable of providing him with this security, even if it means the loss of his own

596 freedom. That is why any important fa is invariably surrounded
614 by a small group of intimates who are bound to his fate, often
621 by a reciprocal agreement based on an oath.

608 One of these sacramental alliances is particularly solemn; its purpose is to create a kind of kinship analogous to that which links blood brothers. There is always a profound difference between natural and contractual brotherhood, since the former exists and produces its effects independently of the will of those involved, whereas the latter exists and is valid only within the limits agreed upon by the contracting parties (1).

1. It should be noted that fraternization in its symbolic form has a necessary consequence which is not obligatory for other types of alliance by oath: it obligates the descendants of the contracting parties just as much as those undertaking the contract.

For a pact of brotherhood (dyonge) (2), the contracting

2. This term unquestionably derives from the verb siri, "to link, to unite."

parties, whether two or several, proceed as they see fit, either in public or privately in the presence of only close relatives and intimates. Each party to the agreement pricks his forearm and extracts a few drops of blood. The blood thus obtained is mixed with a small quantity of goat's milk in a receptacle. Calling upon the ancestors or some god chosen for the occasion to bear witness, each party in turn promises with a solemn oath to consider the others as his brothers. At the same time, he repeats the [226] conditions of the pact and finally sips some of the liquid.

This is the closest alliance that two Bambara can contract (1). Among other things, it forbids one to marry women

1. Blood-brotherhood was contracted

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between Deni-ba Bo for the Massa-si of Kaarta and Suleyman Ba for the people of Fouta.

belonging to the other's community, at least virgins or women reputed to be such. This is because a first sexual contact is likely to result in some flow of blood, and brotherhood imposes a terrible punishment on anyone who sheds the blood of a blood-brother or one of his people. As is apparent, the obligation undertaken by the contracting parties holds for all their descendants, regardless of sex and in infinitum. Henceforth there is a very close solidarity between the two communities, who are so bound to mutual aid that, in practice, anything (including lies, slander, and perjury) is permissible to overcome a common enemy or, in any event, to help the ally in trouble.

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In place of the brotherhood oath, many other forms of oath can be used. Thus, the chronicles tell of Sounsan and Fa Siné forming an alliance with an oath which was undoubtedly binding, because the anvil on which it was sworn was afterwards cast into a well. Nko, Sounsan's god, received the oath under which the "young men" who were Massa's companions allied themselves to the latter's fate. At Ségou, the tondyon' likewise swore loyalty on the idols.

These sacramental agreements are endlessly varied, but they bind the parties only under the stipulated conditions, especially as regards the respective communities of the fa who take the oath.

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III. Marriage.- There is no better way for a Bambara to show his attachment to someone whose alliance or friendship he desires than by giving him as a wife one of the girls of his own community and providing her with a generous dowry. This is one of the most solemn forms of alliance between communities (2).

2. People united by marriage are called furu-nyuan' (spouses) and biran' (allies).

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581 Koulibali of Ségou, founded Bamako, and changed its name to Niaré
583 in becoming Bambara.

The tné: the taboo concerning an animal or some object.
621 The basis of this alliance is the oath of the fa not to kill or eat the
784 object of the taboo. All the generations following this ancestor must respect the taboo ad infinitum.

Thus, the Kéita have the hippopotamus for tné; the Traoré, the Dambélé, and the Warata have the panther; the Samaké, the elephant; the Koubilali of Ségou, the hippopotamus; those of Issa Ber, the m'polio [a fish]; others have the mole cricket (n'gere) and the striped mouse (n'kelika); the Niaré, Sisé, Silla, Doukouré, and the Daramé, the python, etc.

The oath: this seals a pact of dyonge fraternization. Each
621 party to the contract extracts some drops of blood from his forearm
608 which is mixed with goat's milk. Swearing by his ancestors, he states the conditions of the alliance and drinks part of the beverage. This alliance binds the parties to it and all their descendants ad
[582] infinitum. It entails a prohibition or, contrariwise, a recommendation of marriage between members of the two communities, and establishes solidarity between the two communities which owe each other mutual assistance. In the framework of this alliance is the cathartic alliance termed sénankuya, which, besides the preceding obligations, governs the system of purifications.

The sénankuya: unites certain specific groups bearing differ-
621 names within the same village, but can also have an intertribal
608 character; ex.: Mandingue-Peul. Humblot observed the following
648 alliances at Kankan: Kéita-Fofana; Kondé-Traoré; Kéita-Béreté-Sérigou-Sissé; [56] Kala-Kéita-Kouyaté; Kourouma-Koma; Kourouma-Dabo; Kourouba-Konaté-Kamara-Bagayoko; Konaté-Dougoumoko; Konaté-Sidibé. This system of alliance in which
[783] the two allies are equal and complementary governs the mechanism of the purifications, notably by the insult, and the duties of reciprocal assistance (1). Formerly, when a sénanku was reduced to slavery,

1. M. Griaule, "L'alliance cathartique" [The Cathartic Alliance], Africa, Vol. XVIII, 1948.

608 his ally had to try to ransom him. A sénanku often serves as inter-
621 mediary in arranging marriages, in land claims, in the collection of
648 debts. He is rewarded by gifts. He has the power to stop quarrels and to oppose acts of rage and violence by the man whose sénanku he is, no matter what his rank and no matter how important the decisions in question are. The sénanku of a Fama could prevent his declaring war or condemning to death one of his subjects. Moreover, he has certain limited privileges over his ally's possessions. (He may appropriate unimportant objects, food, and even sums of money.) Finally, he recruits the labor force which his ally may need.

c. Age Classes. -- But though these different ties exercise an
621 important influence on the political, social, and religious life of the
571 community they are generally too broad and too lax to permit organiza-
561 tion of a work community. In fact, we have seen how a large village may be formed of different communities relatively independent of each other, despite the authority of the founding community's fa. On the level of the canton, the geographical dispersion does not permit the Fama to intervene personally in the organization of the work community. The latter is founded essentially on the system of relations of the age classes.

561 From infancy until circumcision for the boys, until excision for the girls, the young Bambara belongs to a hierarchic society which prepares him or her for this ceremony and which provides an education complementary to that received in the family. Within this association all the children are divided into age classes: boys up to six years of age are bilakoro-dogomani (bila = short pants), from 6 to 10 years they are bilakoro-dogoma, from 10 to about 15 years, bilakoro-koroba. Similarly, the girls are, successively: sunkiri-dogomani, sunkuru-dogoma, and sunkuru-koroba. Each age class has a chief: ton-tigi for the boys, musso-tigi for the girls; each office is doubled by a deputy (syere). There is also a treasurer and a ton-dyeli who is the griot of the ton. All are elected by members of the society. A Bambara will be influenced all his life by his membership in a certain age class which groups all the children who underwent circumcision at the same time. In fact, up to the moment of circumcision the child's personality is not yet distinct. We have seen before how small children were

608 [59] No one may oppose the Fama's will, except his sénanku
643 who has the power to stay the chief's decisions, particularly in case of acts dictated by anger: murders, wars, etc.

The Fama's resources came from the work of his familiars,
643 from a levy on wild foodstuffs, half of the war booty, all otherwise
651 unowned goods, from certain precious substances, such as gold and
652 ivory, from taking part of every animal killed in the hunt and the skins of all wild animals brought down, all receipts for the right to hold markets, for grazing, and for changing pastures, tolls for river crossings, fines, and from the sale of prisoners of the law. On the other hand, he had to meet the following expenses: to feed and clothe the members of the community in the case of need;to maintain the warriors (give them a groom, a wife, a rifle, a horse); bestow favors on people of caste, feed them, clothe them, arrange for their marriages if need be; make offerings to charity; receive strangers; feed prisoners detained for judgment or otherwise held.

643 The Fama ordered all work of common interest: construction
653 and maintenance of fortifications, clearing trails, preservation of springs, construction and upkeep of the mosque if one was needed, making pirogues for common use, setting up rest platforms.

These works were carried out through payments in labor. The work was divided up among the villages by the Fama, and the village chiefs in turn assigned it to family heads. He who did not carry it out in person could have it done by members of his family; he who refused could be obliged to comply by force.

642 Bambara society rarely achieved a systematic and centralized form of organization analogous to our European kingdoms. What has been dignified with the name of "empire" was scarcely more than an organization which reflected the attraction exercised by a family, by reason of its prestige or its power, on groupings which accepted its suzerainty. As Monteil has shown very well, a family's effort at domination has always been directed at groupings of people and not at territorial expansion.

642 The whole of these groupings constitutes the Ton. This in-
565 cludes:

1. a chief, the ton-tigi;
2. the local chiefs, fa;

642
565 3. the free men;

4. people of caste, such as blacksmiths, etc. (see below);

5. slaves.

567 e. Slavery. -- A man became a slave in three ways: by violence, by obligation, or by birth.

567 1. By violence. If a war captive is important, he may be killed or he may be held for ransom and treated with consideration.
727 A Fama captured in war could become an army chief or dignitary in
554 the country of his captor and could found a family there. In no case could he be reduced to captivity on his own territory.

[60] If the vanquished is a man of caste, he is spared captivity and generally enters the service of the conquering Fama;
[608] if he is a sénanku of the victor, the latter gets rid of him by freeing him. Finally, if the captive has the same name as the victorious
[551] Fama, he is freed, because he is recognized as being a relative of the Fama.

When the captive is a free man of humble origin, he is sold by the Fama, unless the Fama gives him to his warriors.

567 2. By obligation. A free individual became a slave in
681 punishment for his crimes or misdemeanors; he was then sold for the
426 profit of the Fama. A fa could sell one of his children to meet his
858 debts, but he subsequently had to try to buy him back once he was freed of his obligations.

567 3. By birth. A woman slave bears only slaves. The slave born in the house is called a wolo-so. If a woman slave is got with child by a free man, she becomes free, as does her child. But if the mother is repudiated, she reverts to slavery, while the child remains free.

567 As the number of slaves grew, their organization became
644 complicated and hierarchic. The slaves under the Fama of Ségou were divided into series, each having as chief the eldest of the slaves. The eldest of these chiefs became chief of the dyon-kuru or dyon-futu (ensemble of slaves). Monteil shows the important role this slave chief has played in the history of Ségou. In fact, he was the spokesman for all the grievances of the slaves and often became the Fama's adviser. At the death of the Fama, the slave chief confirmed the power of his successor by assuring him or refusing him the submission of all the slaves.

463 554 [324] The numu: blacksmiths, whose wives are generally potters. The smiths are the masters of fire, those who cook the sacred earth in order to extract the minerals or to fix the form of pottery.

The loro: coppersmiths.

The garanka: leatherworkers.

The kule: woodworkers, and sometimes saddlemakers.

The donso: hunters, who form powerful and feared associations.

The somono, or fishermen, who have a status a little less restricted than that of the artisans mentioned above.

The dyeli or griot, domestic factotums of a kind, who, although the most disdained of all these, are nevertheless the family archivists.

[563] One may add two Peul shepherd tribes, identified by Manson: the Dyanna and the Bouguena (1).

1. See Monteil, Les Bambara du Ségou et du Kaarta [The Bambara of Ségou and Kaarta].

463 564 All of these artisans are endogamous and fixed in caste, father to son. However, the fact that a man belongs to a caste does not obligate him to exercise the caste trade.

326 463 609 The most powerful guild is incontestably that of the blacksmiths. From their ranks are recruited all the priests, the Fama's interpreters, the well-diggers, the grave-diggers, the executioners, the circumcisers, etc. They are the sénanku of all the families and are in charge of all the purification rites.

554 The griot are equally feared, because of the power of their words and because they spread afar the renown of the chiefs.

564 The free man who marries a woman of caste marries beneath himself, and his children are looked down on.

[326] The purest blacksmith families are those of the Fané Balo; the purest griot those of the Koniaté. People of caste always remain [527] at liberty; when they are captured during a war, they make themselves known and keep their status.

463 326 [64] These different guilds are sufficient to maintain in the Bambara country a certain industry of a distinctly artisan and non-specialized type. Thus, the smiths work iron, copper, and wood to

695 or in the chief's vestibule, that is to say, under the light of a certain
643 constellation and witnessed by the founding ancestors who link the judge with the supernatural powers. The Fama was seated on a throne perched on a platform; at his right were the notables, at his left the griot, the priests, and the old captives; behind him stood the
[95] sofa. The blacksmith or a captive repeated aloud what the Fama whispered, for the Fama should not raise his voice. Neither women nor children could attend the public sessions. Formerly, the mere view of the Fama filled the accused with terror, and he prostrated himself in the Fama's presence. The Fama could put the accused in irons until he was judged (1).

1. V. Paques, "L'estrade royale des Niare" [The Royal Platform of the Niaré] Bull. de l'Ifan, Vol. XV (1953), No. 4.

671 Bambara law sought above all to make reparation, to restore order, and only after that to punish.

a. Proofs (2)

2. Passim. Coutumier juridique de l'A.O.F. [French West African Common Law].

695 The plaintiff must prove his case, and the accused must prove his innocence. Elements of proof may be confession, testimony by witnesses, oath taking, expert opinion, and examination of the scene.

If indications of guilt are strong enough, the Fama may force the accused to confess by having him whipped.

Each party may call witnesses in the following order: circumcised men, married women, unmarried girls (who, however, cannot [70] take the oath), and, lastly, children if there are no
[608] other witnesses. The sénanku are exempted from bearing witness against each other.

689 Public violation of decency is punished by death.

684 For adultery, the man is put in irons and pays a fine, the woman is whipped by her husband, her brothers, or the Fama's police. Relations with a woman in mourning draws public scorn on the guilty, while a man who commits adultery with a pregnant woman is put to death. A captive who is the lover of his master's wife is put to death.

689 Vagrant individuals are presumed to be escaped captives and are handed over to the Fama.

735 Finally, begging is authorized, because, say the Bambara, it is better to have begging than stealing.

d. Responsibility

[608] The Fama judges all his subjects, except his own sénanku whom he has judged by his tribunal. The law is applicable to every circumcised man and excised woman recognized as sane. (The demented are put in irons.) They are responsible for their acts, but the family of the guilty is also responsible. The father of an uncircumcised boy is responsible for the boy's acts, the husband for the acts of his wife, and we have seen that a man's crime may lead to the punishment of his whole family. Let us further remark that a master was judge of his slave, but when a difference arose between slaves of different houses, their case was referred to the tribunal. The tribunal also weighed the death penalty [72] when a slave committed a grave fault. Finally, the foreigner who lives in the Bambara country is judged by Bambara laws.

672 567 692 [609]

672 We must also note that the penalties apply to all crimes committed voluntarily; every infraction or damage involuntarily committed is excusable on the condition that it be immediately confessed. Thus it is that a hunter meeting a pair of lovers in the bush may kill them for outraging public decency, but must admit his crime immediately upon returning to the village.

[684]

e. Inheritance

428 Monteil has noticed an order of succession in the Ségou region which does not correspond to that described by other authors, such as Ortoli or Aubert. In fact, at the death of the fa, " ... everything that belonged to him remains undivided under the new faya of